TWIN CITIES PRESBYTERY

PRESENTATION #2

THE STEWARD AS BIBLICAL IMAGE
EMANCIPATING THE PREACHER FROM MAMMON

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"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." --Matthew 6:24 (RSV)

"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." --I Corinthians 4:1 (RSV)

Introduction -

Good to be in Twin Cities

new area for me -

always impressed with what I know about the Arts - theatre, Pinkus Zuckerman, some great churches, Hubert Humphry, Harmon Killebrew - and, of course, Garrison Keillor. I'm a member of sub-cult, i.e. those people who are a little miffed at the rest of the country for having found out what we've been doing at dinner-time Saturday for years. . .

— My son in Brooke Shields class of '87 -

Who are snobbish enough to regard the millions of newcomers with disdain and to know that we are among the few who know and appreciate Lake Wobegon Days.

It's also good to catch up with Pete Slindemantle with whom I share an interest in Muskingum College, New Concord, Ohio - which produced Phil Caldwell, C.E.O. at Ford, Chuck Pilliod, C.E.O. at ~~Goodyear~~ Firestone, Al Warren, Vice President for ~~Tabo.~~ Labor Rel. ~~Rd.~~ at G.M., John Glenn, and still can't be spelled or pronounced properly.

When I was invited to speak - Diana Barber, Nancy Farrelll and Pete were quick to let me know a little of their agenda and they mentioned two names that got my attention -

Douglas John Hall, whose book The Steward, A Biblical Symbol Come of Age, was distributed and is to be the theological footing for the experience: and Jim Forbes, prof. of Homiletics at Union - whose tapes on Stewardship have something to do with Hall - and which, as are all ~~Earl~~ Forbes's efforts, breathtaking.

I confess that my first reaction to the notion of Hall on stewarship left my head swimming. He's the last person I would have thought would write on the topic. I met him in Richmond, heard him lecture - was stimulated, disturbed - at a Mexican Dinner with him which was equally stimulating and disburbing: went home and bought Lighten Our Darkness and The Reality of the Gospel and the Unreality of the Churches, devoured them, was disturbed by them. They are great books. Hall gets under my skin. He is not the writer who comes to mind first when I'm thinking about the Stewardship Campaign.

Red Smith
Peter Lawler
- Darren Rowan
throw typewriter out

And Forbes - do you remember what it was like to go to the ballpark and watch a Ted Williams, Willie Mays, or George Brett, and then sense how awkward and uncoordinated you are. Or - even watch Mac Farlane or Everett-Lloyd and then hit some balls and know - profoundly - the limits of your flesh? Well, Jim Forbes has that effect on me. He is the best, a gifted preacher/prophet/pastor who is shaping, right now, American preaching.

I asked the logical question. Why me? Why not Hall or Forbes? My new frieds were candid: they're both unavailable. And so I feel a little like then Mayor of New York City, John Lindsey - on the dais at a political dinner - preceded by all the heavy hitters of the Democratic Party (this is both dated and sexist) - Lindsey said - "I feel like Zsa Zsa Gabor's fifth husband or Mickey Rooney's fourth wife) "I know what's expected of me, but I'm not sure I can make it interesting."

One of the immediate differences between Hall, Forbes and myself is that I work for, serve, and am paid by a church that looks a lot like the Manna from which we need to be delivered. To work for that institution - or - frankly -

any institution which participates in our culture, which pays salaries with some degree of intentionality and which at least discusses on occasion the relationship between the percentages of its resources it gives away and the percent it keeps for itself - is to be ~~faced~~ forced to deal with the basic theological questions of Mammon and Stewardship.

I will not scold you for materialism which is what usually happens when we start talking about Mammon - for a number of reasons - one of which is that I'm not in any position to, another of which is I don't think it is theologically appropriate and the most important of which is that you/I - all of us already feel guilty enough.

Hall quotes Robert Hempfling in one essay, The Liberation of the Middle Class (speaking for lots of our members) - "I'm tired of feeling guilty about being middle class and being characterized as mediocre, superficial, and banal in my thinking and life style. I contend that such sterotyping is neither fair nor accurate." [p. 85]

People, Hall points out, are rightfully weary of being made to feel guilty by their preacher and personally responsible for third world poverty. We are guilty - Hall contends - but scolding a single parent who ~~bravely~~ barely is able to pay the bills - is not fair. ~~Gentle exposure to global realities~~ is his ~~strategy~~.

I-m not going to scold because I think you and I are tired of scolding both as recipients and givers.

Bob Lynn, former Dean at Union, now at the Lily Foundation, who, with the Alban Institute, is doing some creative thingking about Endowed Churches - says that the most important theological task for the American church is to come up with a thology that makes some sense of affluence in a very poor world - or else get poor. That is a subject for another day.

At the very least you and I ought to be able to deal with the reality of who we are without rationalizing, excusing or denying it. Even Robert McAfee Brown suggests that denial is not helpful... We Can't resign from the middle class.

The issue - Hall will teach - is responsibility. And part of the theological task - the prolegammena to a theology of stewardship, for me, is a theology of incarnation: an affirmation of the goodness of creation, love for the creation, responsibility for the creation.

I want to make some preliminary observations about the topic of Stewardship in general - then review with you some of the Hall material which I found particularly provocative,

and then explore some meanings of the Mammon from which we need to be emancipated.

A. The Pastor's role in "cultivating the grace of liberality "is absolutely critical. Aspects of that role:

1. Pastor as giver - if you don't believe it, nobody is going to believe it. If you don't give, nobody is going to give. The pastor teaches by making a responsible pledge - and doesn't hide it.

2. Pastor as asker - needs to be able to ask people to give: must be able. If you can't - go back and find out why -

Ordinarily we come from pretty modest backgrounds in which no one asked anybody for money. Or we're so personally insecure we don't want people to feel ill toward us.

Ask - if you don't - somebody else will.

3. Pastor must preach about Stewardship and money -

Jesus talked about money - more than sin or salvation. You aren't doing them a favor - or being theologically honest if you leave impression that sermons are too spiritual and money, or money is too [illegible] for sermons.

4. Pastor pays attention to Stewardship Committee - Administration - ~~kept~~ Most important _____ written communication ~~in your church~~.

5. Pastor believes that people need to give and that Jesus was right. "It is more blessed to give - "

These are the givens - the necessities - but not the whole story -

B. Stewardship is more than beating the drum for God and money.

It is - fundamentally and essentially - proclaiming the Gospel.

Stewards - ala Hall - are what we ~~all want~~ are to become in response to God's love in Jesus Christ.

My mentor, ~~Wilbur~~ Wilburn Thomas - said "If you want to raise money, raffle a Pontiac."

Stewardship involves rethinking the matter of how we understand and tell the Gospel - in terms of God's unconditional love for the world and our responsibility for the world.

On that topic - hear Hans Kung, Does God Exist [p. 619]

"The first demand on the believer is to say 'no'

to all the other gods. 'One-god faith dethrones the divine world powers in favor of the one, true God... All the gods before whom moderns bow... the great God Mammon, the great God Sex, the great God Power, the great God Science, the great God Nation, the great God Party. The one God faith is utterly opposed to any quasi-religion. It throws down all false gods." [p. 619] The theological issue is always monotheism - idolatry.

C. We're Not Doing So Hot -

The competition for the benevolence/charitable dollar is fierce.

No one is predicting a quick-end to the Federal Budget crisis. Even the most favorable political forecasts predict indefinite period of belt-tightening, which means less for Education, Arts, Health Care, Research... which means that College, Symphony Orchestra, Art, Music and Hospital - unlike Church - being in and of the world and comfortable with it, have hired full-time public relations and fund development experts, are paying them competitive dollars and are budgeting significant amounts to fight for their future.

They are getting to our people with expertise, class and urgency, ~~mounting~~ with highly intelligent, highly sensitive and highly effective campaigns to raise money. And here we come with a mimeographed budget that no one can understand, and a brochure using language no one really comprehends and a few illustrations the woman on the Session who got a new Minolta for Christmas has provided, and with a team of callers who don't want to ask, feel uncomfortable asking and consequently don't ask.

(For years Fourth Presbyterian Church didn't ask - simply renewed ~~year~~ new pledge unless you requested a change and was/is proud of never asking for money.)

Lyle Schaller says we don't ask enough.

I agree.

I don't think we ever hurt ourselves by asking.

The only way I ever was involved with raising significant amounts of money was to ask for it - specifically - by amount - for a specific cause.

Stackhouse et al will tell you more about that.

I'm more concerned with underlying theology - the footing.

II. D. J. Hall, The Steward: A Biblical Image Come of Age or: Emancipating ourselves from a limited, limiting and inadequate concept of Stewardship.

A. Begin by letting go of the idea that Stewardship is the name with which we disguise money raising in the church (this may be heresy).

-we disguise what we are about and we limit the concept with euphemisms like -

-Stewardship pledge

-Stewardship campaign

Why not financial pledge?

Why not financial campaign?

What is a Stewardship Budget?

B. Stewardship is the end, not the means to an end. It is a synonym for discipleship.

"Stewards" are what we are to become in Jesus Christ; not part of what we are to do.

Let's allow for a much larger context for Stewardship and for the possibilities that when we believe in Jesus christ and become new creations - what we become is a Steward.

C. That expanded concept has its roots in some very traditional Biblical material: let's look -

-A steward in the Bible is not a generous giver but a responsible manager ...

-A responsible supervisor, manager who managers and supervises for someone else - ordinarily the King

-Ownership is elsewhere. Now this is a radical concept.

Says Hall -

"As soon as God is pictured as the owner and master of that in relation to which human beings can be, at least, stewards, institutions such as the holding of property and the hierarchical distribution of authority are thrown ~~with~~ into a critical perspective. It does not require a Marx or a Freud to voice that challenge" [p. 24]

The Old Testament says simply that God's sovereignty means ownership and our creatureliness means we are tennants. We don't own the place. It is our nature - the essence of our being - to manage it for the owner.

D. In the New Testament Christians are "stewards of the mysteries of God-" responsible for the mysteries of God -

Church, in the New Testament, is a stewarding community whose very nature is to manage, be responsible for - God's inclusive, unconditional love for the world and for all people, which is what the mystery is.

E. This broadened concept of Stewardship as virtual synonym for faithfulness never survived antiquity, and is insipid today, Hall says, because of the intellectual phenomenon call Hellenism.

Hellenism shaped and molded the culture of the Western world and in the process "spiritualized" the Gospel.

Hellenism is "that mishmash of Egyptian, Persian, Greek and other cultures created largely by the military conquests of Alexander the Great" [p. 31]

It was the Americanization factor of the period.

The Gospel was Hebrew - in style. Christianity was born in Hebrew, thought and spoke and acted

out of Hebrew background and confronted immediately a world becoming Greek.

Religion in philosophic structures of dualism, Hellenism rejected the essence of the Hebrew world view - namely that creation was a whole, not a layered affair, or a bifurcated affair - and that the whole is good. When God steps back, looks at creation, and pronounces it good, God is speaking Hebrew.

Hellenism, on the other hand, harbored what Hellenism calls an abiding suspicion of matter.

"The material world, including of course human body, was regarded as inferior, the seat of evil, dangerous, fundamentally unreal. To get in touch with the Real, one had to slough off so far as possible on'e material attachemnts together with the passions associated with them. Through such detachment one might rise to the realm of the spirit. Hence the function of religion - and philosophy - was to lift persons out of 'bondage to the flesh' and related them to the transcendent - realm of pure spirit. Salvation in Hellenism means salvation from the world." [p. 32]

great 2 pages on Hellenism/Christianity

In Hebrew thought, Sin is broken relationship.

In Greek, Sin is wrong thoughts and deeds.

In Hebrew - Faith is earthy, God blows breath into a body God has formed from dirt - the body - and all the wonderful things it does - is good - ?

Evil enters the world - through the human spirit. "Matter in this faith is the victim of spirit." [p. 33]

Hellenism inverts that - the material world itslef is evil, including body, and the source of sin.

In its early formation stages Christianity as religion - fell under heavy ~~hearing~~ influence (not total) of Hellenism.

And ~~then~~ thus - because of its strongly anti-material otherworldly tendency - the image of Steward atrophied before it had an opportunity to grow.

The time is here for de-Hellenization of the Gospel (which along with its disestablishment just might save us, according to D.J.H.)

In essence, philosophy and history conspired, after Constantine, to have Christians believe that they didn't have to do anything about the world, decide anything about their life in the world.

Hall sees a continuing Docetism, a - despising the world - in modern culture.

Certainly the toxic pollution of the air we breath, the water we drink, acid rain, and the human traged of overpopulation and the human and spiritual holocaust which is occuring in urban ghettoes - reveals a deep antipathy, bordering on hostility to the created world...

We now know, if we ever doubted it - that our technology will not save us and cannot serve as a foil for our despising of creation. The technology we hoped might save us - can easily destroy us.

Even religion participates in this hostility toward the world. Media religion continues the docetic heresy, Hellenism in living color, with fountains in the background.

"Perhaps the desire to escape from 'reality' has never been so strong as it is in our present time. It can be observed that the most popular activities in the Western world today are activities that offer the illusion of escape: sex, sports, food, travel, entertainment. And perhaps the most escapist activity of all is religion." [p. 43]

F. Hall proposes a revivification of the Steward Image. It begins with the question -

1. Do you or do you not love/care for this world?
2. It proceeds with a realistic affirmation of one's personal power and influence (related to affirmation of goodness of creation and personal worth) "You have the power to love and change the world. Will you?
3. Then Hall offers a new and fascinating new rubric - The Stewardship of all Believers - as alternate for Priesthood of all - which

if we ~~even~~ understood we surely don't anymore..
Our people think all it means is we don't
need a priest to pray for us - which doesn't
approach the power of the metaphor +.
[See p. 128/9]

The world needs people who love it.
Rosemary Radford Reuth says that all the
accumulated problems of several centuries
are coming to crises in the next several
decades.

Nuclear weaponing, population, economic
injustice - poverty/wealth, and ecology -

Those crises are so large and profound that they can only be addressed by a profound love for the world: by people who know God's love for the world and who know how to be faithful by loving it effectively and creatively.

III. Now let's talk about Mammon ?

I.D.B.

"a world of uncertain Semitic origin meaning wealth, money, prosperty, profit"

There are 2 New Testament references -

Matthew 6:24

Luke 16:13-

can't serve God and -

A. It is more than money. It is the mystique of money, the essence of property, the principality of wealth.

Mammon - Nancy Farrell suggested is the "structures of materialism of our culture."

I like that. It is that - other than God - ~~that~~ which forms and shapes our values, plans, hopes and our use of resources including our personal power.

back to sermon P5

It's more than money: it is that to which we would sell out. And it is the "selling out" that is the focus of the Biblical idiom, I believe "To sell out is to be in captivity to it, to be under its influence - and it is that which concerns the Bible.

I think it's akin to Paul's Principalities and Powers - which Stringfellow defines as anything that has power over us and renders us unfree.

In Private and Public Faith, William Stringfellow showed how versatile P. & P. are - that most commonly it is that image of ourselves to which we are captive.

The real Mammon question is who am I serving, not how much money am I making?

The real Stewardship question is how responsible am I being for the world and the people in it.

B. A Tributary -

On money or "stuff" - G. Carlin

We have trouble even talking about money because we are so sensitive and so uncertain -

-because we'd like to make more and yet feel like we're already making too much.

-because clergy shouldn't make much if anything for responding to God's call -

Average Physician - $104,000. We don't blanch at $90,000 attorney, $80,000 brokers, $50,000 educators - but resist putting money value on ourselves.

We still battle docetism - can still feel guilt and we live with a lingering sense that because we make more than some of our people they will find out and resent it (or us). I know about this stuff. I've been there and still am.

You will not even approach wealth. Most of us, in fact, seem to end up somewhere about in the middle of our people which I think is where we ought to be. And if we're uncomfortable making what we're making we really ought to be asking what we're doing in the middle of these particular people.

Professor Becker talks about the losses of ministry - wealth, family time, privacy, status - values for which many people give a lot.

You did not take a vow of poverty and if you did, you should not have, particularly if you are asking a spouse and children to share life with you.

What you did, when you became Presbyterian clergy was put very precise limits on the up-side of your earning potential - and you resolved to live in the middle of a particular people through whose invitation to be their pastor you heard God's call.

What you do with your money is a part of your Christian vocation.

Our problem is that w're not sure we ought to be paid at all to do our work, and we are so captive to the values of our culture that we're not convinced that what we do is actually worth money.

It's helpful to remember that all those are theological questions - the most basic one of all, the Stewardship Question, is who am I serving.

C. Where did your ideas about money come from:

-family/parents/past - trace it

relationship to Depression is significant

48 or older - either a child, young person or born during depression

48 or younger - at least your parents were deeply affected by depression.

Your children's children will be first generation in century not to be deeply influenced by Great Depression.

If you are from working class family you carry that depression experience with you

-frugality

-fear of debt

-boarderline hostility for those who accumulate capital

~~capital~~ insecurity

The biggest difference between my parents and me - is that I have the opportunity they didn't - to be responsible - to love the world and change it. They were barely able to make it on their own.

A warning - for those who feel they make too much -

If R. R.'s plans work - a system which slowly has been developed to help you live a full life will pass away and you will be marginal -

e.g. - let's talk G.S.L.'s and education - my move to Chicago simply made it impossible for me to get G.S.L.'s and four paying tuition - I'm not wealthy!

D. More critically -

-Does Mammon shape you?

Does a form of Mammon shape your church and you and make you unfree - or from what Mammon do you need to be liberated?

1. I'll never say you need liberation from the paltry dollars you make

2. But we may need to be liberated from the model of success/growth to which our culture sells out and which is very, very enticing -

.What form does this take?

.How to recognize this Mammon?

a. Growth Model of churches -

i.e. you're not faithful unless things are bigger this year than last

-essentially members and budgets -

b. TV evangelists have caused some of this. We are inclined to fawn our bigness - we play games with each other - to reveal our numerical strength - or innovative programs - that's Mammon

c. I operate on assumption that the reality is probably never quite as glowing as it sounds when we begin to compare statistics...

d. Sometimes I think we excuse inepties too easily: sometimes churches aren't growing because they're not getting the leadership they need.

But in other cases churches don't grow because they're in situations that won't allow growth -

We're called - not to be successful - but to be faithful - and sometimes if we're trying too hard to be successful we stop being faithful.

3. Need to be liberated from an image of ministry that comes from outsiders -from culture or church = i.e. holy person, great faith, more prayer, spiritual.

-You can break loose by living your humanness: have a stake in your community (ala Stringfellow - live in it) don't try to save it imperially - even from itself - simply live thoroughly in it.

4. Or perhaps the Mammon from which you need liberation is from the image of your predecessor and the expectations that you will conform to it, and the knowledge that you are being measured by it.

5. Or from image derived from Seminary mentors: we torture ourselves with self-imposed image of perfect pastor/prophet so that we can never do enough - make enough calls or liberated enough of the oppressed.

6. Our Special Mammon is our bondage to an image of ministry which reflects a cultural definition of the successful professional.

   a. How we need this: the culture rewards hustle, drive, winning, sales, production. We can't replicate it so -

   b. We compensate with a self-imposed work regimen that can be obsession and demonic and destructive.

c. We impose a curse of busyness
on ourselves - most of which comes
from our deep need to feel and
appear successful, worthful.
--the casualties of which are health,
marriage, families, self-esteem.

(Alternate ending

The guilt we bear
we are ~~stand~~ saved by grace, not work.
We need to hear Gospel ~~which~~ while admonishing our folk
to "~~find~~ feed the sheep," ~~we~~ we need to remember that we are
among the sheep that need to be fed.

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I don't work Saturdays (even though I know others, for good reasons, chose to). I guard evenings much more than I used to and regret that I didn't start much earlier. It can be done - I'm convinced.

I simply refuse to miss one - time only concerts or games in which my progeny have a part if it is humanly possible. I am shameless. I will simply say, "I can only be here for 30 minutes. My son is starting at center this afternoon."

I ~~feel good about that.~~

~~Now the brief expedition deeper into the territory.~~ I conclude that the most serious detriment to our happiness, even our sanity, in ministry is the nearly pathological attachment most of us have to busyness; and conversely our refusal to stop and give time to self. I'd like to call on Wayne Oates to help us. Oates is the distinguished Professor of Psychology of Religion at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville. Ten years ago Oates wrote a book, Confessions of a Workaholic: The Facts About Work Addiction, in which I found most of the ministers I know.

Workaholism, according to Professor Oates, is "addiction to work, the compulsion of uncontrollable need to work incessantly...It has its beginnings in childhood. It becomes acute in second and third decades of life. If it is not reversed or arrested in the forties or early fifties, it becomes chronic and may lead to death in one form or another in the late fifties and/or sixties." (p. 1)

How can you tell if you are a workaholic? AA has helped us to be sensitive to the warning signs of alcohol addiction in ourselves and those we love. What are the early signs of workaholism?

1. A workholic, in the middle of social conversation will tell how early he came to work; how late he stayed; how little sleep he's been getting, comparing himself favorably to Thomas Edison, who, everybody knows, never slept at all.

2. A workaholic, in private conversation, will compare the amount of work she is capable of producing with the paltry amount achieved by her peers. A workaholic is always busy: even at leisure she is tightly programmed and running slightly behind.

3. A workaholic can't say "no". A familiar litany is, "If I don't do this job, who will." Oates ~~observes objectively~~: "...he is likely to take on more and more over and above his prescribed activities. He is a perfectionist but he commits himself to so many people for the use of his skills that he cannot do the job well. This results in an anxiety depression amounting to panic." (p. 60)

4. A workaholic has real trouble with leisure. ~~Back in 1918 a psychoanalyst~~ by the name of Fercuczi observed "Sunday neurosis" in busy executives. By Sunday afternoon they were experiencing anxiety, physical distress, depression. A workaholic takes little if any time off, often forgoes vacation, or works while on vacation, works all day Saturday and Sunday morning, and is simply incapable of relaxing in leisure.

5. A workaholic is "other-directed", rather than "inner-directed". David Riesman in The Lonely Crowd, coined the phrase "other directed". It means behavior determined from outside "rather than by an autonomous self that makes decisions on the basis of a carefully developed value system." (p. 14) A workaholic doesn't have an inner life, the prerequisite for a strong sense of identity.

6. A workaholic has problems with the theology of grace, the idea of God's unearned love. He or she cannot deal with forgiveness without paying, and whenever the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed simply doesn't hear the Good News. Workaholics believe they can produce everything they need, alone. If they need spiritual benefit, they'll get it by working for it; not by receiving an open-ended offer from God. Thus life is invested in building a "mighty fortress" - an impregnable bastion of security...in public esteem, in professional skill, in real estate - in money. The name of the game is working for salvation.

Those are the signs. We see all of them in some people and some of them in all. - back to my narration

The real problem with the workaholic, however, is that he or she is applauded, praised and supported by the culture. Excessive work is seen, not as a problem, but as evidence of commitment, love, loyalty, and self sacrifice. The Protestant work ethic - the drum to which most of us march - is very suspicious of idleness and the model of the successful, upwardly mobile man or worman is the one who works harder than anybody else, is at the office earliest, stays latest, and works through lunch. Organizations love workaholics. William H. Whyte, in his classic study, "The Organization Man", discovered that large organizations depend on those ascetics who will subordinate all for the organization and, of course, will pay him or her handsomely.

It is possible to laugh at most of those observations. Oates means his book to be amusing. What isn't funny at all is the price nearly everybody in medicine, psychology, religion, and management agrees we must pay for work addiction: burn out - divorce - family alienation - ulcers - alcoholism - heart attack - depression - suicide.

What I see is the guilt. We know the price we are paying personally. We see the effects in our relationships, we know what we are neglecting, the joy we are missing. The guilt itself becomes a heavy load to bear.

What is the answer? One is tempted to propose the logical antidote: rebel, revolt, react. Some do. Some must. Some sell out, cash in, retire the business attire and take up pottery in the mountains of West Virginia. That seems logical, but obviously everybody can't do that. In fact, somewhere in this exercise I want to say something in praise of hard work and in defense of self sacrifice for goals that are intrinsically worthy, such as the security and well-being of one's family, the education of one's children, the cultivation of professional skills or the planting of a straight row of corn. Working hard, by itself, is not indicative of addiction. Somewhere in this I want to testify to the grace of hard work, the fulfillment of extending oneself and

and accomplishing and completing and ending the day with a sense that some things are a little better for what one has done. I'm grateful, frankly, that there are people almost possessed with their work to find a cure for cancer. I'm glad for hard working, self sacrificing lawyers and bankers and teachers and carpenters and preachers. The solution is not laziness, unemployment, sloth.

The antidote is, first of all, the simple responsibility each of us has, regardless of age, station, or status, to assign priorities to all the demands made of us starting with our personal needs, relational needs, professional requirements, and avocational pursuits. They are not all equal. Our personal needs come first - when that list gets out of order, unhealthy things begin to happen.

The solution is, second, to come to terms with the need each of us has for an inner life. We may have buried that need. We may be frightened of the very idea. But each of us needs inner space, time, a lonely place to use Jesus' phrase. We have no authenticity, no core, no identity without that.

It is, finally, I am convinced, a theological issue. It is a matter, ultimately of coming to terms with grace - and that may mean the necessity of a conversion experience for many of us. Our addiction to work is theological. It springs from our inability to trust anybody else or conversely, from our egotism which keeps telling us that we can be self-sufficient, self-reliant, that we need nothing.

I was touched to read Professor Oates's recollection of his conversion from a lifetime of workaholism. He became aware of his addiction when his child kept reminding him how much he was missing. His awareness grew when a back problem which became worse when he overworked. The crisis came when his eldest son was in Vietnam. Oates writes: "He was a combat sailor, a machine-gunner on a small river assault boat in the Mekong Delta. And for the first time in my life I was helpless. None of my actions or work could change a thing. I found myself fallingback heavily on extra work to handle my anxiety. In the summer, my major defense was gone...I realized that I could not face it alone, but that I needed God's help and the help of all the other people I could get."

And so one man changed his way of living, and started coming home at 6:00 without exception, and became very careful about extra commitments, and began to trust that God indeed would save him, and that he didn't have to do it all alone. His testimony is that it worked and that the amount and the quality of his work has not suffered at all. And this is perhaps the worst - but also the best news of all.

The Good News of the Gospel is that in Jesus Christ God loves us. That graceful love requires no work, no merit, only our receptiveness. That grace is sufficient...it can liberate us even from our addiction to work. It frees us for full life, it frees us from all the schemes by which we try to assure our security.

We need to help one another. If the ~~institutional~~ church is feeding our addiction: if you are a volunteer for any reason other than that you want to be; if you are away from a family and feeling guilty - please resign. Let us help each other. Let us help each other to use the time God has given, responsibly, effectively, and gratefully. Let us support the person who decides to arrange priorities honestly, and to take time to do the important things. Let us never judge or condemn when we see it happen.

And in the midst of it all, let us covenant together to remember that our chief end, according to those wise old theologians, is not to work till we drop in our tracks, but to glorify God and enjoy ~~him~~ God forever.

which means being responsible -

for world - ~~[illegible]~~ being of our own lives

~~the~~

which is - what stewardship is about -